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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: AMBASSADOR IDRISOV ON RAKHAT ALIYEV,  
POLITICAL SUCCESSION, RUSSIA, OTHER ISSUES

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4 (B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador met Kazakhstan's Ambassador Erlan Idrisov for lunch at the Georgetown Club in Washington on December 5. They discussed

-- President Nursultan Nazarbayev's exiled ex-son-in-law and how he is an irritant in the U.S.-Kazakhstan bilateral relationship;

-- presidential succession in Kazakhstan;

-- Kazakhstan's desire to accelerate its WTO accession negotiations;

-- Kazakhstan's perception of a "new great game";

-- Freedom House's rigidity; and

-- frozen cows. END SUMMARY.

RAKHAT ALIYEV

12. (C) Idrisov explained how Kazakhstan thinks culturally about Rakhat Aliyev, currently exiled in Austria: he violated Kazakh traditions of family (and, by extension, national) loyalty and fealty; he shamed himself, his family, and his country; he is a criminal on the lam. Having burnt every bridge, the only thing he can do now is seek political asylum in the West. Idrisov said: "I accept that our judicial proceedings against him were clumsy (closed military-court proceedings); we shouldn't have done that; but that is simply where we are in our judicial development."

13. (C) According to Idrisov, Aliyev is using his off-shore wealth to deploy a Western (mostly European) public-relations campaign to build sympathy for his attempt to find political asylum. Every time the Western media report on Aliyev from Aliyev's point of view, it's a huge irritant in "Ak Orda" (Nazarbayev's White House). From Nazarbayev's traditional cultural view, Aliyev makes him look weak, like a father who cannot control his son, which is a huge cultural shame. (NOTE: During lunch, Idrisov took a call from Deputy Foreign Minister Khairat Sarybay (1:00 am Astana time!), complaining

about the December 3 pro-Aliyev, anti-Nazarbayev article in the "Washington Times." END NOTE.)

14. (C) Idrisov's advice: At every possible opportunity at high levels, the United States needs to repeat that we are in no way secretly supporting Aliyev or in contact with him, because Kazakhstan suspects that we are. Ideally, Idrisov said, Nazarbayev needs a phone call from President-elect Obama or Vice President-elect Biden, both of whom Nazarbayev greatly respects, to tell him we have not supported, we are not supporting, and we will not support Aliyev. (COMMENT: We need to make crystal clear at the highest levels we have no dog in this fight. This obsession makes little rational sense from our perspective, but we need to understand it is an existential obsession for Nazarbayev. END COMMENT.)

15. (C) Footnote: Former Prime Minister Kazhygeldin, exiled in London, is reportedly ramping up a new public relations campaign to impugn Nazarbayev's Kazakhstan as it prepares for its 2010 OSCE chairmanship. Idrisov said Kazhygeldin is portraying himself, Chelabi-like, as the "democrat" who will save Kazakhstan. To quote Idrisov, "It's pure bullshit."

#### PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

16. (C) What is the plan for presidential succession in Kazakhstan? Idrisov: "This is a great problem, because there is no institutional plan. The institutions have not been developed, and that, frankly, is where we have failed. Nazarbayev doesn't want to stay forever. He believes he's already achieved his legacy. What he wants is to wait until the "Bolashak Generation" is ready to take over. This has

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been his dream from the beginning. He wants Kazakhstan to join the world as a respected player in its own right. He doesn't want Kazakhstan to be someone's appendage. Kazakhstan is no one's 'little brother.'" (NOTE: Under the Bolashak Program during the past decade, Kazakhstan has sent nearly 5,000 young people to the West for university education, and all but a handful have returned. Many are now in mid to upper levels of government and private business. END NOTE.)

#### WTO ACCESSION

17. (C) Idrisov said Kazakhstan wants to ramp up again its WTO-accession activity, especially because Russia is pushing to lock the CIS countries into its new customs union, which would effectively mean no individual country in the union could join WTO until Russia does and under Russia's terms. Idrisov said this does not mean the various chapter negotiations will be easy, but Kazakhstan is newly motivated because of Russian pressure.

#### THE NEW GREAT GAME

18. (C) Idrisov: "We will always be close to Russia, and you have to accept that." (NOTE: We do. END NOTE.) "But we know by experience Russia presses us in ways we don't like. We need you (the United States) to stand with us without the usual irritants. Russia wants us to be one thing that we are not; you want us to be another that we are not -- please let Kazakhstan be itself. Whether you like the term or not, Russia is playing a New Great Game for all it's worth. It has zero-sum tunnel vision and wants you totally out of Central Asia, and is doing everything possible at all levels to achieve that. We are not trying to play you against Russia; we want you to stand with us."

#### FREEDOM HOUSE

19. (C) Idrisov: "I scheduled our most recent parliamentary delegation with Freedom House so that both sides could listen to each other. At the end of the scheduled time, it seemed there was more to say. The Freedom House Central Asia

director agreed to a second meeting. After a short time, he stood up and said, 'I don't have time to listen to this' and walked out. Later, he called me and apologized, but the damage had already been done. He knows what he believes and refuses to listen to the complexities of reality."

#### FROZEN COWS

¶10. (U) Idrisov: "Ten years ago when Nazarbayev was trying to force bureaucrats to move to Astana, Kazakhstan-TV filmed a humorous report about a farmer who was moving two cows from Almaty to Astana in an open truck during the winter. When the truck arrived at Astana, the cows were frozen solid. The segment was a great comic hit that's still remembered, but Nazarbayev was livid, and a few heads rolled."  
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